

TESTIMONY
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE
Presbyterian Church
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ON THE SUBJECT OF
S L A V E R Y.

A. D. 1858.

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN PUBLICATION COMMITTEE,
1334 CHESTNUT STREET.

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DURING the sessions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church held in Cleveland, Ohio, in the year 1857, the Assembly adopted a paper on slavery containing the following clause:—

“The Assembly call the attention of the Publication Committee to this subject, and recommend the publication, in a convenient form, of the testimony of the Presbyterian Church touching this subject, at the earliest practicable period.”

In accordance with this recommendation, the Presbyterian Publication Committee issue this tract, in which they have confined themselves strictly to the record of the testimonies and deliverances of the Presbyterian Church on this subject. This they believe to be the intent of the vote of the Assembly.

PHILADELPHIA, 1858.

Testimony of the General Assembly

ON THE

SUBJECT OF SLAVERY.

FIRST NOTICE OF THE MATTER IN SYNOD, A.D. 1774.

"A REPRESENTATION from the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles and the Rev. Samuel Hopkins respecting the sending two natives of Africa on a mission to propagate Christianity in their native country, and a request that the Synod would countenance this undertaking by their approbation of it, was brought in and read. The consideration of the above deferred."—*Min.* 1774, p. 456.

"The representation and request relative to sending negro missionaries to Africa was taken into consideration, in consequence of which the subject of negro slavery came to be considered, and, after much reasoning on the matter, Dr. Rodgers, Messrs. Jno. Miller, Caldwell and Montgomery were appointed a committee to bring in an overture on Wednesday morning."—*Ib.* p. 456.

"The committee appointed to prepare an overture on the representation from Dr. Stiles and the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, and also on the subject of negro slavery, brought in a draught, the first part of which, being read and amended, was approved, and is as follows:—

"The Synod is very happy to have an opportunity to express their readiness to concur with and assist in a mission to the African tribes, and especially where so many circumstances concur, as in the present case, to intimate that it is the will of God, and to encourage us to hope for success. We assure the gentlemen aforesaid that we are ready to do all that is proper for us in our station for their encouragement and assistance."

"But, some difficulties attending the discussion of the second part of that overture, the Synod agree to defer the affair to our next meeting."—*Min.* 1774, p. 458.

ACTION IN SYNOD, A.D. 1787.

"The following was brought in by the Committee of Overtures:—

"'The Creator of the world having made of one flesh all the children of men, it becomes them, as members of the same family, to consult and promote each others' happiness. It is more especially the duty of those who maintain the rights of humanity, and who acknowledge and teach the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power to extend the blessings of equal freedom to every part of the human race.

"'From a full conviction of these truths, and sensible that the rights of human nature are too well understood to admit of debate, overtured, that the Synod of New York and Philadelphia recommend, in the warmest terms, to every member of their body, and to all the churches and families under their care, to do every thing in their power, consistent with the rights of civil society, to promote the abolition of slavery, and the instruction of negroes, whether bond or free.'

"The Synod, taking into consideration the overture concerning slavery transmitted by the Committee of Overtures last Saturday, came to the following judgment:—

"'The Synod of New York and Philadelphia do highly approve of the general principles in favor of universal liberty that prevail in America, and the interest which many of the States have taken in promoting the abolition of slavery; yet, inasmuch as men introduced from a servile state to a participation of all the privileges of civil society, without a proper education and without previous habits of industry, may be in many respects dangerous to the community, therefore they earnestly recommend it to all the members belonging to their communion to give those persons, who are at present held in servitude, such good education as to prepare them for the better enjoyment of freedom: and they moreover recommend that masters, wherever they find servants disposed to make a just improvement of the privilege, would give them a *peculium*, or grant them sufficient time, and sufficient means of procuring their own liberty at a moderate rate, that thereby they may be brought into society with those habits of industry that may render them useful citizens; and, finally, they recommend it to all their people to use the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and state of civil society, in the counties where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America.'"—*Min.* 1787, pp. 539-540.

"Ordered, That the records of the General Synod of the year 1787, on the subject of slavery, be published among the extracts to be printed of the proceedings of this Assembly."—*Min.* 1793, p. 76.

SESSIONS AT CARLISLE, A.D. 1795.

Communion with Slave-Holders.

(a.) "The following overture was brought in by the Committee on Bills and Overtures,—viz.:

"A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people, who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, Ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold communion with the latter?"

"Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

"*Resolved*, That, as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially to those whom it immediately respects, to do the same.

"At the same time, the General Assembly assure all the churches under their care that they view with the deepest concern any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country, and refer the churches to the records of the General Assembly published at different times, but especially to an overture of the late Synod of New York and Philadelphia, published in 1787, and republished among the extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of 1793, on that head, with which we trust every conscientious person will be fully satisfied

"*Resolved*, That Mr. Rice and Dr. Muir, ministers, and Mr. Robert Patterson, an elder, be a committee to draught a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania on the subject of the above overture, and report in the afternoon.

"The committee appointed to prepare a draught of a letter to the Presbytery of Transylvania reported a draught, which being read and debated for some time, a motion was made, Shall this draught of a letter be read and debated by paragraphs, or not? The vote being taken, the question was carried in the affirmative. The consideration of the draught was resumed; and, after a very considerable time spent therein, it was amended and adopted, and ordered to be signed and sent to the Presbytery of Transylvania by their commissioners. As follows:—

“To our Brethren, members of the Presbyterian Church under the care of the Transylvania Presbytery.

“DEAR FRIENDS AND BRETHREN:—The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church hear with concern from your commissioners that differences of opinion with respect to holding Christian communion with those possessed of slaves agitate the minds of some among you, and threaten divisions, which may have a most ruinous tendency. The subject of slavery has repeatedly claimed the attention of the General Assembly, and the commissioners from the Presbytery of Transylvania are furnished with attested copies of these decisions, to be read by the Presbytery when it shall appear to them proper, together with a copy of this letter to the several churches under their care.

“The General Assembly have taken every step which they deemed expedient or wise to encourage emancipation and to render the state of those who are in slavery as mild and tolerable as possible.

“Forbearance and peace are frequently inculcated in the New Testament. Blessed are the peacemakers. Let no one do any thing through strife and vain-glory. Let each esteem others better than himself. The followers of Jesus ought conscientiously to walk worthy of their vocation, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering forbearing one another, and endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If every difference of opinion were to keep men at a distance, they could subsist in no state of society, civil or religious. The General Assembly would impress this upon the minds of their brethren, and urge them to follow peace and the things which make for peace.

“The General Assembly commend our dear friends and brethren to the grace of God, praying that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may possess their hearts and minds.’

“Signed by order of the Assembly.”—*Min.* 1795, pp. 103–104.

(b.) “Whereas, it appears from memorials sent up to this Assembly that several of our Presbyteries have adopted resolutions excluding slaveholders from their pulpits and from their communion; and whereas our Constitution requires that no member of the Presbyterian Church shall be thus disfranchised without a regular trial and conviction; and whereas this proceeding is a repetition of the excising acts of the New Basis Assembly, against which we have taken our stand as the friends of the Constitution: therefore,

“Resolved, That the said Presbyteries be requested to rescind such resolutions.

"The foregoing resolution was, with one dissenting voice, adopted."—*Min.* 1840, p. 24.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1815.

"The committee to which was committed the report of the committee to which the petition of some elders who entertain conscientious scruples on the subject of holding slaves, together with that of the Synod of Ohio concerning the buying and selling of slaves, had been referred, reported; and their report, being read and amended, is as follows,—viz.:

"The General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of those principles of civil liberty which appear to be recognised by the Federal and State Governments in these United States. They have expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans and of their descendants still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the Church, and have urged the Presbyteries under their care to adopt such measures as will secure, at least to the rising generation of slaves within the bounds of the Church, a religious education, that they may be prepared for the exercise and enjoyment of liberty when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation. The committee refer said petitioners to the printed extracts of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, for the year 1787, on this subject, republished by the Assembly in 1793, and also to the Extracts of the Minutes of the Assembly for 1795, which last are in the following words,—viz.:

"A serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil, highly offensive to God and injurious to the interests of the gospel, lives under the ministry of a person, or amongst a society of people, who concur with him in sentiment on the subject upon general principles, yet for particular reasons hold slaves and tolerate the practice in others. Overtured, Ought the former of these persons, under the impressions and circumstances above described, to hold communion with the latter?

"Whereupon, after due deliberation, it was

"Resolved, That, as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially to those whom it immediately respects, to do the same.

"This is deemed a sufficient answer to the first petition; and, with regard to the second, the Assembly observe that, although in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be

unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them, as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. And they recommend it to the Presbyteries and Sessions under their care to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.' "—*Min.* 1815, p. 586.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1818.

Overture on Selling a Slave, a Member of the Church.

"The following resolution was submitted to the Assembly,—viz.:

"*Resolved*, That a person who shall sell as a slave a member of the Church who shall be at the time of sale in good standing and unwilling to be sold, acts inconsistently with the spirit of Christianity and ought to be debarred from the communion of the Church.'

"After considerable discussion, the subject was committed to Dr. Green, Dr. Baxter and Mr. Burgess, to prepare a report to be adopted by the Assembly, embracing the object of the above resolution and also expressing the opinion of the Assembly in general as to slavery.

"[The report of the committee,] being read, was unanimously adopted, and referred to the same committee for publication. It is as follows,—viz.:

"'The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, having taken into consideration the subject of slavery, think proper to make known their sentiments upon it to the churches and people under their care.

"'We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoin that "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system: it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the gospel; whether they shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbours and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery,—consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very existence. The evils to

which the slave is always exposed often take place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and where all of them do not take place—as, we rejoice to say, in many instances, through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the mind of masters, they do not—still, the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

“From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen, of enslaving a portion of their brethren of mankind,—for “God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth,”—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery both with the dictates of humanity and religion has been demonstrated and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest and unwearied endeavours to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and, if possible, throughout the world.

“We rejoice that the Church to which we belong commenced as early as any other in this country the good work of endeavouring to put an end to slavery, and that in the same work many of its members have ever since been, and now are, among the most active, vigorous and efficient labourers. We do, indeed, tenderly sympathize with those portions of our Church and our country where the evil of slavery has been entailed upon them,—where a great, and the most virtuous, part of the community abhor slavery and wish its extermination as sincerely as any others,—but where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally, render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent alike with the safety and happiness of the master and the slave. With those who are thus circumstanced we repeat that we tenderly sympathize. At the same time, we earnestly exhort them to continue, and, if possible, to increase, their exertions to effect a total abolition of slavery. We exhort them to suffer no greater delay of slavery. We hope that those portions of the American Union whose inhabitants are by a gracious Providence more favourably circumstanced will cordially and liberally and earnestly co-operate with their brethren in bringing about the great end contemplated.

“We recommend to all the members of our religious denomination, not only to permit, but to facilitate and encourage, the instruction of their slaves in the principles and duties of the Christian religion, by granting them liberty to attend on the preaching of the gospel when they have

opportunity, by favouring the instruction of them in the Sabbath-school wherever those schools can be formed, and by giving them all other proper advantages for acquiring the knowledge of their duty both to God and to man. We are perfectly satisfied that it is incumbent on all Christians to communicate religious instruction to those who are under their authority; so that the doing of this in the case before us, so far from operating, as some have apprehended that it might, as an incitement to insubordination and insurrection, would, on the contrary, operate as the most powerful means for the prevention of those evils.

“We enjoin it on all church-sessions and Presbyteries under the care of this Assembly to discountenance and, as far as possible, to prevent all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves, especially the cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people of the blessings of the gospel, or who will transport them to places where the gospel is not proclaimed or where it is forbidden to slaves to attend upon its institutions. And if it shall ever happen that a Christian professor in our communion shall sell a slave who is also in communion and good standing with our Church, contrary to his or her will and inclination, it ought immediately to claim the particular attention of the proper church-judicature; and, unless there be such peculiar circumstances attending the case as can but seldom happen, it ought to be followed without delay by a suspension of the offender from all the privileges of the Church till he repent and make all the reparation in his power to the injured party.’

“*Resolved*, That fifteen hundred copies of this report be printed or published in the newspapers.”—*Min.* 1818, pp. 692–694.

SESSIONS AT PITTSBURG, A.D. 1836.

Indefinitely postponed.

“The Assembly resumed the subject of slavery.

“The following motion was made by Dr. Hoge:—‘Inasmuch as the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, in its preliminary and fundamental principles, declares that no church-judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience, in virtue of their own authority; and as the urgency of the business of the Assembly and the shortness of the time during which they can continue in session render it impossible to deliberate and decide judiciously on the subject of slavery in its relations to the Church: therefore,

“‘*Resolved*, That this whole subject be indefinitely postponed.’

“*Adopted.* Yeas, 154; Nays, 87.”—*Min.* 1836, p. 272.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1839.

Referred to the lower judicatories.

"Whereas, certain memorials have been sent up to this Assembly from several Presbyteries desiring some action on the subject of *slavery*; and whereas, these memorials have been read and freely discussed by this body; and whereas, this Assembly is made up of members from different portions of our extended country, who honestly differ in opinion, as well in regard to the propriety as the nature of the ecclesiastical action desired in the case: therefore,

"*Resolved*, That this Assembly does most solemnly refer to the lower judicatories the subject of slavery, leaving it to them to take such order thereon as in their judgment will be most judicious and adapted to remove the evil."—*Min.* 1839, p. 22.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1840.

In 1840, the whole subject was indefinitely postponed.—*Min.*, pp. 18, 19.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1843.

"Whereas, there is in this Assembly great diversity of opinion as to the proper and best mode of action on the subject of slavery; and whereas, in such circumstances, any expression of sentiment would carry with it but little weight, as it would be passed by a small majority, and must operate to produce alienation and division; and whereas, the Assembly of 1839, with great unanimity, referred this whole subject to the lower judicatories, to take such order as in their judgment might be adapted to remove the evil:

"*Resolved*, That the Assembly do not think it for the edification of the Church for this body to take any action on the subject.

"*Passed.* Yeas, 66; Nays, 33."—*Min.* 1843, p. 19.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1846.

Declaration of the General Assembly on the subject of Slavery.

"1. The system of slavery as it exists in the United States, viewed either in the laws of the several States which sanction it, or in the actual operation and results in society, is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system, and is opposed to the prescription of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, and to the best interests of humanity.

"2. The testimony of the General Assembly, from A.D. 1787 to 1818 inclusive, has condemned it; and it remains still the recorded testimony of the Presbyterian Church of these United States against it, from which we do not recede.

"3. We cannot, therefore, withhold the expression of our deep regret that slavery should be continued and countenanced by any of the members of our churches; and we do earnestly exhort both them and the churches among whom it exists to use all means in their power to put it away from them. Its perpetuation among them cannot fail to be regarded by multitudes influenced by their example as sanctioning the system portrayed in and maintained by the statutes of the several slave-holding States wherein they dwell. Nor can any mere mitigation of its severity, prompted by the humanity and Christian feeling of any individuals who continue to hold their fellow-men in such bondage, be regarded either as a testimony against the system or as in the least degree changing its essential character.

"4. But while we believe that many evils incident to the system render it important and obligatory to bear testimony against it, yet would we not undertake to determine the degree of moral turpitude on the part of individuals involved by it. This will doubtless be found to vary in the sight of God according to the degree of light and other circumstances pertaining to each. In view of all the embarrassments and obstacles in the way of emancipation interposed by the statutes of the slave-holding States and by the social influence affecting the views and conduct of those involved in it, we cannot pronounce a judgment of general and promiscuous condemnation implying that destitution of Christian principle and feeling which should exclude from the table of the Lord all who stand in the legal relation of masters to slaves, or justify us in withholding our ecclesiastical and Christian fellowship from them. We rather sympathize with and would seek to succor them in their embarrassments, believing that separation and secession among the churches and their members are not the methods that God approves and sanctions for the reformation of his Church.

"5. While therefore we feel bound to bear our testimony against slavery and to exhort our beloved brethren to remove it from them as speedily as possible by all appropriate and available means, we do at the same time condemn all divisive and schismatical measures tending to destroy the unity and disturb the peace of our churches, and deprecate the spirit of denunciation and that unfeeling severity which would cast from the fold those whom we are rather bound by the spirit of the gospel and the obligations of our covenant to instruct, to counsel, exhort, and try to lead in

the ways of God, and towards whom, even though they may err, to exercise forbearance and brotherly love.

"6. As a court of our Lord Jesus Christ we possess no legislative authority, and as the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church we possess no judiciary power. We have no right to institute and prescribe tests of Christian character and church-membership not recognised and sanctioned in the Sacred Scriptures and in our standards by which we have agreed to walk. We must therefore leave this matter with the Sessions and Presbyteries and Synods—the judicatories to whom pertains the right of judgment—to act in the administration of discipline as they may judge it to be their duty, constitutionally subject to the General Assembly only in the way of general review and control.

"(Yeas, 92; Nays, 29; *non liquet*, 3.)"—*Min.* 1846, pp. 28–30.

SESSIONS AT PHILADELPHIA, A.D. 1849.

"The committee to whose consideration were submitted sundry papers on the subject of slavery now present to the Assembly the following report, consisting of preamble and resolutions:—

"These documents are nineteen in number, embracing memorials from four Synods, thirteen Presbyteries, one church, and one from certain individuals. The object of these papers is one and the same, namely, to free the Presbyterian Church from all participation and connection with slave-holding. The measures proposed are various,—some more and some less stringent. Some ask for discipline, others for a pastoral letter, a third class for separation from the evil complained of, without defining the mode; one proposes the reorganization of the church to which we belong into three General Assemblies; one threatens secession if something is not done; and others ask for nothing definite. While these voluminous papers furnish a considerable variety as to tone and manner and intimations as to the future, and likewise as to a knowledge of the intrinsic difficulties attending this complicated evil, they are sufficiently respectful in their language and grave and weighty in their opinions and arguments to demand the wise and prayerful consideration of this Assembly. This consideration we believe we may say, without boasting or arrogance, they have received from your committee; and we have a cheerful confidence they will now receive the same from this body.

"The subject is not a new one: it has occupied the attention of the Presbyterian Church from the commencement of its organization,—even before the General Assembly had an existence; and your committee are happy to avail themselves of the lights of former times in presenting this difficult matter to you, and through you to the judicatories and churches

under our care. Your committee would deprecate two errors into which minds of different and opposite structures, on this and all similar subjects, are liable to fall. One class forget that we live in an age of progress, and the other forget that the first step in progress is not perfection. In relation to both of these great truths here alluded to, we should, as rational beings and as Christians, be ready to obey the intimations of Providence, and to follow the guidance of the torch-light of truth which the hand of God holds up before us,—to go forward as that goes onward, and to move no faster than its blessed radiance is shed upon our pathway. All theories, when they come to put on the forms of experiment, must yield to the authority of uniform and universal facts; and both progressives and conservatives might render themselves much more comfortable as well as useful in our world if they were more deeply imbued with this one practical truth. These remarks apply with great force to all evils which are interwoven with the very texture of social organization; and slavery is by no means an exception.

“Your committee propose to embody the sentiments of this Assembly, in relation to this evil, in the following resolutions:—

“*Resolved*, That we reaffirm the sentiments expressed by the Assembly of 1815, and especially in the following quotations:—

“‘The General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of those principles of civil liberty which seem to be recognised by the Federal and State Governments of the United States. They have expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans and of their descendants still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the Church, and have urged the Presbyteries under their care to adopt such measures as will secure, at least to the rising generation of slaves within the bounds of the Church, a religious education, that they may be prepared for the exercise and enjoyment of liberty when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation.’

“Again: ‘The General Assembly assure all the churches under their care that they view with the deepest concern any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country.’

“And again: ‘The Assembly observe that, although in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them, as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. And they recommend it to Presbyteries and Sessions under their care to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.’ [See ante, pp. 7, 8.]

"2. *Resolved*, That this General Assembly reaffirms the opinions expressed by the General Assembly of 1818. The following extracts are commended to special notice,—viz. :

" 'We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoins that "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system: it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the gospel; whether they shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbours and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery,—consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very existence.'

"Again: 'From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen of enslaving a portion of their *brethren* of mankind,—for "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth,"—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery both with the dictates of humanity and religion has been demonstrated and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest and unwavering efforts to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and, if possible, throughout the world.' [See ante, pp. 8, 9.]

"3. *Resolved*, That we reaffirm the 'Declaration of the General Assembly on the subject of slavery' made in the year 1846. The following sentiments are particularly commended to the serious and prayerful attention of our judicatories and churches,—viz. :

" 'The system of slavery as it exists in these United States, viewed either in the laws of the several States which sanction it or in its actual operation and results in society, is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system, and is opposed to the prescriptions of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, and to the best interests of humanity.'

"Again: 'But, while we believe that many evils incident to the system render it important and obligatory to bear testimony against it, yet would we not undertake to determine the degree of moral turpitude on the part of the individuals involved by it. This will doubtless be found to vary in the sight of God according to the degree of light and other circumstances pertaining to each. In view of all the embarrassments and obstacles in the way of emancipation interposed by the statutes of the slave-holding States, and by the social influence affecting the views and conduct of those involved in it, we cannot pronounce a judgment of general and promiscuous condemnation, implying that destitution of Christian principle and feeling which should exclude from the table of the Lord all who stand in the legal relation of master to slaves, or justify us in withholding our ecclesiastical and Christian fellowship from them. We rather sympathize with and would seek to succour them in their embarrassments, believing that separation and secession among the churches and their members are not the methods which God approves and sanctions for the reformation of his Church.' [See ante, pp. 11, 12.]

"4. *Resolved*, That, in the judgment of this Assembly, these declarations of former General Assemblies bear an explicit, frank, honest and honourable testimony against the evils of slavery, and they ought to be 'known and read of all men.'

"The following principles are clearly stated in the documents above referred to and quoted :—

"1. That civil liberty is the right of man as a rational and moral being.

"2. That the institution of slavery, in the language of a former Assembly, 'is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system,' and injurious to the highest and best interests of all concerned in it.

"3. That it is 'the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day' 'to use their honest and unwearied endeavours' 'as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and, if possible, throughout the world.' This General Assembly do most solemnly exhort all under our care to perform this duty, and to be ever ready to make all necessary sacrifices in order to effect a consummation so much to be desired.

"4. When circumstances over which good men have not the control inevitably prevent the attainment of this ulterior and desirable purpose at once, there are other and important duties which cannot be neglected without great guilt, such as a watchful care for the interests of the soul,

direct religious instruction, and the communication of that practical knowledge of life and its objects which may prepare this portion of our fellow-men for 'the exercise and enjoyment of liberty when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation.'

"5. There are incidental evils which belong to this system, which, when they occur in the Church, should be corrected by discipline, such as 'buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them.' To these may be added the breaking up of the family relationship and separating husbands and wives, parents and children, 'thus rendering it impossible for rational, moral and immortal beings to perform the duties and cherish the endearments of social life.'

"All these things are fairly and fully presented in the declarations of preceding Assemblies, and quite as explicitly before the division of the Presbyterian Church as since.

"5. *Resolved*, That while we bear this testimony against the system of slavery as it exists in this country and elsewhere, and which testimony coincides with the almost uniform testimony of all good men in every age, and especially with that borne by the fathers of the Presbyterian Church to which we have herein referred, and while we commend these DECLARATIONS OF SENTIMENT to the attention of all the judicatories and all the churches under our care, we feel ourselves bound to add that there has been no information before this Assembly to prove that members of our Church in the slave States are not doing all that they can (situated as they are in the providence of God) to bring about the possession and enjoyment of liberty by the enslaved; nor are there any facts before us to show that they are living in the violation of the duties growing out of their relations to slavery as it is continued in existence by the laws of their respective States; nor do we know that they tolerate any of those evils which ought to call forth the discipline of the Church; but, if there are such cases, we would direct the attention of the proper judicatories to them in the exercise of a kind and salutary discipline.

"Commending these views to the consideration of all under our care, and especially of those whose lot is cast where the institution of slavery exists, and which the smallness of their numbers forbids us to suppose they have the power of controlling, we leave this whole matter with God and the consciences of all those who love his blessed cause."—*Min.* 1849, pp. 185-188.

SESSIONS AT DETROIT, A.D. 1850.

[The committee report] "That after a careful and thorough examination of the whole subject they have been brought to the conclusion that, in

consideration of the previous action of the Assembly had at different times for a series of years, and what they believe to be its present sentiments and the expectations of the churches in its connection, the cause of *truth* and *righteousness*, of *peace* and *unity*, will be best subserved by the adoption of the following resolutions:—

“*Resolved*, 1, That we exceedingly deplore the working of the whole system of slavery as it exists in our country and is interwoven with the political institutions of the slave-holding States, as fraught with many and great evils to the civil, political and moral interests of those regions where it exists.

“*Resolved*, 2, That the holding of our fellow-men in the condition of slavery, except in those cases where it is unavoidable by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship or the demands of humanity, is an offence in the proper import of that term as used in the Book of Discipline, chap. i. sec. 3, and should be regarded and treated in the same manner as other offences.

“*Resolved*, 3, That the Sessions and Presbyteries are, by the Constitution of our Church, the courts of primary jurisdiction for the trial of offences.

“*Resolved*, 4, That after this declaration of sentiment the whole subject of slavery as it exists in the Church be referred to the Sessions and Presbyteries to take such action thereon as in their judgment the laws of Christianity require.

“Adopted. Yeas, 87; Nays, 16.”—*Min.* 1850, p. 325.

SESSIONS AT UTICA, A.D. 1851.

“The memorials are few in number, (four in all,) kind in spirit, decorous in matter, and no doubt conscientious in origin. The committee have carefully read and considered these documents, and unanimously and cordially agree to the following result:—

“That the Assembly have reason to be thankful to Divine Providence for the wisdom and prudence vouchsafed to the last Assembly in coming to conclusions on this vexed question which have so generally met with the acquiescence of the Church at this crisis; and that it seems obviously our duty at the present session to leave the whole subject as it was placed by that action, and to devote our time to other subjects which demand attention, always praying that God will hasten on the day of universal freedom throughout our land and the world.”—*Min.* 1851, p. 13.

SESSIONS AT WASHINGTON, A.D. 1852.

“The Committee on Bills and Overtures reported four memorials on the subject of slavery. These memorials ask of the Assembly,—

"1. A further expression of opinion on the subject of slavery.

"2. That it be enjoined on the lower judicatories to bring every case of slave-holding under examination for particular condemnation or vindication.

"3. That the several Synods be cited to appear before the next General Assembly to answer charges which it is alleged common fame brings against them in connection with slavery.

"The committee are of opinion,—

"1. That the General Assembly has already so clearly and explicitly defined its views on the subject that no further expression of opinion is demanded at the present time.

"2. That the demand for an injunction on the lower judicatories to take action with respect to this subject is not in accordance with the provisions of our Constitution. (Vide chapter on Review and Control.)

"3. That the several memorials which ask for the citation of the Synods should be referred to the Judicial Committee.

"In view of these reasons, the committee ask to be discharged from the further consideration of the subject.

"Adopted."—*Min.* 1852, pp. 160–161.

SESSIONS AT BUFFALO, A.D. 1853.

"The report of the committee was adopted, and is as follows:—

"The committee to whom was referred the subject of slavery respectfully report, that twelve memorials touching this grave matter, from various Synods and Presbyteries, have been put into their hands. Of these, eleven are from the *North*, praying the Assembly for further action, and asking for precise information in regard to the extent of the practice of slave-holding in our body, and in regard also to certain alleged aggravations of it in the unchristian and cruel treatment of slaves. One is from the *South*, complaining of unkindness and injustice on the part of many Northern brethren, in charging upon the memorialists practices of which they are not guilty, and in attributing to them motives which they utterly disclaim and abominate,—protesting also against the continued agitation of this subject, as tending more to rivet than to loose the chains of the slave, and seriously to embarrass them in their gospel work.

"Your committee, after much serious and prayerful consideration of this whole subject in all its complicated and perplexing relations, and with a solemn sense of responsibility to God and to his Church, are of one mind in recommending to the Assembly the following action:—

"1. That this body reaffirm the doctrine of the second resolution adopted by the Assembly in its action at Detroit in 1850.

"2. That we do earnestly exhort and beseech all those who are happily free from any personal connection with the institution of slavery to exercise patience and forbearance towards their brethren less favoured in this respect than themselves, remembering the embarrassments of their position; and to cherish for them that fraternal confidence and love which they the more need in consequence of the peculiar trials by which they are surrounded.

"3. To correct misapprehensions which may exist in many Northern minds, and allay causeless irritation, by having the real facts in relation to this subject spread before the whole Church, it is recommended earnestly to request the Presbyteries in each of the slave-holding States to take such measures as may seem to them most expedient and proper for laying before the next Assembly, in its sessions at Philadelphia, distinct and full statements touching the following points:—

"(1.) The number of slave-holders in connection with the churches under their jurisdiction, and the number of slaves held by them.

"(2.) The extent to which slaves are held by an unavoidable necessity 'imposed by the laws of the States, the obligations of guardianship, and the demands of humanity.'

"(3.) Whether a practical regard, such as the word of God requires, is evinced by the Southern churches for the sacredness of the conjugal and parental relations as they exist among slaves; whether baptism is duly administered to the children of slaves professing Christianity; whether slaves are admitted to equal privileges and powers in the church courts; and, in general, to what extent and in what manner provision is made for the religious well-being of the enslaved.

"Adopted: Yeas, 84; Nays, 39."—*Min.* 1853, p. 333.

SESSIONS AT ST. LOUIS, A.D. 1855.

"The committee recommend,—

"1. That the General Assembly address a pastoral letter to all the churches under their care, reaffirming the testimony of past Assemblies in regard to the sinfulness of the system of slavery as it generally exists in these United States, and expressing their deep regret at the intemperateness of word and action that has too often characterized the spirit of those who have conscientiously aimed at its overthrow; and that they urge upon their churches earnest efforts, by all Christian and constitutional modes, to remove the evil from the midst of us.

"2. That a committee be appointed to report to the next Assembly on the constitutional power of the Assembly over the subject of slave-holding in our churches; and that we recommend that this evil be removed from

our Church as soon as it can be done in a Christian and constitutional manner.

"Adopted."—*Min.* 1855, p. 30

SESSIONS AT NEW YORK, A.D. 1856.

Report of the Committee "On the Constitutional Power of the General Assembly over the Subject of Slave-Holding in our Churches."

"The report of the committee was adopted, and is as follows:—

"The committee appointed by the last General Assembly 'to report to the next Assembly on the constitutional power of the Assembly over the subject of slave-holding in our churches' respectfully submit the following report:—

"It should be observed at the outset that the committee are instructed to report on but a single point,—that of 'power.' The question before them is not what it may be wise for the Assembly to do,—not what in a particular case, or in general, (authority being presupposed,) would be for edification, but, what is the *power* of the Assembly in the matter of slave-holding? This is a question which can be determined only by reference to our Form of Government. The 'power' on which we are to report is fitly designated as 'constitutional.' We are a constitutional body. No judicatory of our Church has any legitimate functions save those which, either expressly or by clear implication, the Constitution confers. Emphatically should this be said of our highest judicatory, in view of the tendency of human nature, in ecclesiastical connections, to a grasping and tyrannous centralism. The one-man power at Rome is hardly more abhorrent to the genius of Presbyterianism than would be a many-headed Papacy under the name and form of a General Assembly. It should be remembered, also, that, as a visible Church or particular denomination, our Constitution is the sole bond of our union. We are united, externally and formally, only as that unites us. That, of course, must measure and limit the responsibility for each other which grows out of our union. No one part of our body can be held answerable for the evils in another, which, by the terms of our confederation, it has no power to reach.

"The committee would further remark that they do not feel themselves called on to present their views of the moral character of slavery, or to reargue the question whether slave-holding is, in any case, a disciplinable offence. They do not suppose that they were appointed with reference to that question. It was thoroughly discussed in the Assembly of 1850, and the conclusion reached, 'that the holding of our fellow-men in the condition of slavery, except in those cases where it is unavoidable by the

laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity, is an offence in the proper import of that term as used in the Book of Discipline, chapter 1, section 3, and should be regarded and treated in the same manner as other offences.' This opinion has been reaffirmed, either expressly or virtually, by nearly every succeeding Assembly, including the last. Nor do the committee anticipate that any considerable portion of the present Assembly will either stand in doubt concerning it, or incline in the least to a retrograde course. The doctrine set forth at Detroit—set forth simply as a doctrine, and not as a law or judicial decision—is yet, they judge, the settled view of our Church. Taking this for granted, their sole concern is with the relation of the Assembly to the matter. To determine this point, we have only to ascertain what are the constitutional powers of that body in respect to disciplinable offences generally.

"Its functions in this regard, we judge, are of two kinds, *advisory* and *authoritative*; and between these there should be a careful discrimination. The *advisory* function of the Assembly is of very wide scope. According to the Form of Government, chapter 12, section 5, they have the power of 'reproving, warning, or bearing testimony against error in doctrine or immorality in practice in any church, presbytery, or synod,' and 'of recommending . . . reformation of manners . . . through all the churches under their care.' This function of reproof may be exercised in reference to any evil grave enough to call for it. Nor is it an unimportant function. The testimony of such a body as the General Assembly, especially if unanimously given, must have great weight. It has, indeed, only a moral influence. It is not authoritative. It binds no other body, not even a succeeding General Assembly. It binds no individual: yet cases are not unfrequent in which a moral influence of this sort, if not the only one that could be employed, is the most efficacious. It has greater power over the conscience, often, than the most stringent exercise of bare authority.

"As it respects the *authoritative* function of the Assembly, or its power of discipline, that, we judge, can only be exercised in the forms and methods marked out in the Constitution. It is by no means coextensive with its testifying power. As counsel or testimony has only a moral force, the manner in which it shall be put forth is wisely left to the discretion of the Assembly. Not so with discipline. Concerning, as it does, the dearest rights and interests, it is of the highest importance that the mode of its exercise should be particularly prescribed. So we find it in our Form of Government. Every step is distinctly set forth, and the greatest care taken to guard all concerned against mistake and abuse. Nor is any

exception made as to any particular class of offences. If slave-holding is in any case to be dealt with as a disciplinable matter, it must be in some one of the ways explicitly authorized in the Constitution.

"The methods in which the *authoritative* action of the Assembly may be invoked, as appears from the seventh chapter of the Book of Discipline, are four: by *reference*, by *appeal*, by *complaint*, and—to state that last which in the Book of Discipline comes first—by *general review and control*. The three processes first named do not, of course, originate in the Assembly. Their inception is in a lower judicatory. In one or another of them, it is presumed, most of the matters which call for disciplinary action on the part of the highest judicatory will, in due time, come before it. There is, however, a possibility of neglect in this regard; and for such a contingency our Constitution—framed with a wisdom best appreciated by those who have most thoroughly studied it—has made a specific provision. This provision is found in the section on 'General Review and Control.' See Book of Discipline, chap. 8, sec. 1.

"Under this section, there are two methods in which any disciplinable offence—and slave-holding, of course, when it assumes that character—may be reached authoritatively by the Assembly. (1.) It may appear from the records of a Synod, as submitted for inspection, that there has been some wrong-doing or culpable omission in the matter. A case may have been incorrectly decided, or refused a hearing. Or it may be obvious that the records of some Presbytery have not, according to the 2d and 3d articles of this section, been properly disposed of. Or it may appear that the duty enjoined in the 6th article—that of citing a lower judicatory in a given contingency—has been entirely neglected. In cases of this sort there may be 'animadversion or censure,' or, according to Article 3, the Synod 'may be required to review and correct its proceedings.' (2.) 'Any important delinquency, or grossly unconstitutional proceedings,' not apparent from the records, may yet be charged against a Synod 'by common fame.' It may be reported, for example, that through some neglect of the Synod 'heretical opinions or corrupt practices' are 'allowed to gain ground,' or that 'offenders of a very gross character' are 'suffered to escape.' See Articles 5 and 6 of this same section. In such case, provided the rumour is of the character specified in the Book of Discipline, chap. 3, sec. 5,—for a process against a Synod should certainly not be commenced on slighter grounds than against an individual,—the Assembly 'is to cite the judicatory alleged' to have offended to appear at a specified time and place, and to show what it has done, or failed to do, in the case in question; after which the judicatory thus issuing the citation shall remit the whole matter to the delinquent

judicatory, with a direction to 'take it up and dispose of it in a constitutional manner, or stay all further proceedings in the case, as circumstances may require.' See Book of Discipline, chap. 7, sec. 1, art. 6.

"In view of the aforementioned and other provisions of our Form of Government touching the authority of the Assembly, two things are to be carefully noted.

"1. It has no power to *commence* a process of discipline with an individual offender. That, by a just and wise arrangement, belongs to the Session in the case of a layman, to the Presbytery in the case of a minister. The disciplinary function of the Assembly as to individuals is simply appellate and revisionary. It is not the court of first, but of last, resort.

"2. In the way of 'general review and control,' it can reach *directly* only the judicatory next below,—that is, the Synod. (See Book of Discipline, chap. 7, sec. 1, art. 6.) Indirectly, indeed, the doings of other bodies may be involved. A Session may grossly neglect discipline, for example, and the recorded indication or the common fame thereof may not be properly heeded by the Presbytery. The fruit of this heedlessness, or the evidence of it in the presbyterial records, may call forth no appropriate action on the part of the Synod; and this may be brought, by the synodical records, or by general rumour, to the knowledge of the Assembly. On the ground of either the record or the rumour, the Assembly may cite the Synod before them. Thus, *mediately*, may even a Session be reached, but not directly.

"Such are the metes and bounds which our Form of Government has prescribed, and which the Assembly may not overpass. It is quite possible that, in connection with them, offenders of various sorts may sometimes escape. To a human administration, of however divine a system, imperfection always pertains. Our Book of Discipline, indeed, (chap. 3, sec. 3,) distinctly recognises a class of cases in which, 'however grievous it may be to the pious to see an unworthy member in the Church, it is proper to wait until God in his righteous providence shall give further light.' Waiting may be rendered necessary by a lack of fidelity on the part of the lower judicatories, as well as by a lack of evidence. We speak of it, of course, not as an actual but only as a supposable case. And it may seem to some a great evil that the General Assembly is not invested with larger powers. Yet it would be a greater evil to allow any departure from the carefully-devised processes of discipline set forth in the Constitution. To permit the Assembly to adopt at its pleasure new processes—to suit its own powers to real or fancied exigencies—would not only invest it with legislative functions, but would virtually annul the

Constitution, and transform the highest judicatory of the Church into an overshadowing ecclesiastical despotism.

"It has, indeed, been urged—though we see not with what reason—that the advisory function of the Assembly, or its power of bearing testimony, implies the authority necessary to enforce that testimony. Is there then no just and salutary distinction between persuasion and compulsion? Must the two be ever conjoined? Are there no cases in which a simple moral power may, in the nature of things, be most potent? Must the Assembly utter no counsels which are not to be interpreted as mandatory and coercive? If they may enforce all their counsels, how are they to do it? By processes which they themselves devise,—extra-constitutional processes? Or are they to be held to the provisions of the Book of Discipline? They have, it is true, the right, according to the Form of Government, chap. 12, sec. 5, of 'attempting,' as well as 'recommending, reformation of manners.' But the attempt must be made, if discipline is to be involved, only in the method prescribed in the Constitution. To all desirable ends, the committee believe, that method will be found adequate; especially as connected with that testifying and reproving function so often exercised in times past, and which, by a body like the Assembly, can never be wisely exercised but with salutary results.

"ALBERT BARNES,

"ASA D. SMITH,

"WM. JESSUP,

"AUGUSTUS P. HASCALL."

Min. 1856, pp. 197-201.

SESSIONS AT CLEVELAND, A.D. 1857.

"The General Assembly, in view of the memorials before them and of the present relations of the Church on the subject of slavery, feel called upon to make the following exposition of principle and duty:—

"The Presbyterian Church in these United States has from the beginning maintained an attitude of decided opposition to the institution of slavery.

"The Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1787, two years before the organization of the General Assembly, declared that they did 'highly approve of the general principles in favour of universal liberty that prevail in America, and the interest which many of the States have taken in promoting the abolition of slavery, and did recommend it to all their people to use the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and state of civil society in the parts where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America.'

"In 1793, while the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church was in process of formation and publication, the action of the Synod just referred to was approved by the General Assembly and republished by its order.

"The Assembly of 1815 declared 'that, although in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them, as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. And they recommend it to the Presbyteries and Sessions under their care to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct.'

"The Assembly of 1815 'expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans and of their descendants still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the Church,' and called particular attention to the action of 1795 with respect to the buying and selling of slaves.

"In 1818, the Assembly unanimously adopted a report on this subject, prepared by Dr. Green, of Philadelphia, Dr. Baxter, of Virginia, and Mr. Burgess, of Ohio, of which the following is a part:—

"'We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature, as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoins that "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system: it exhibits rational, accountable and immortal beings in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action. It exhibits them as dependent on the will of others whether they shall receive religious instruction; whether they shall know and worship the true God; whether they shall enjoy the ordinances of the gospel; whether they shall perform the duties and cherish the endearments of husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbours and friends; whether they shall preserve their chastity and purity, or regard the dictates of justice and humanity. Such are some of the consequences of slavery,—consequences not imaginary, but which connect themselves with its very existence. The evils to which the slave is *always* exposed often take place in fact, and in their very worst degree and form; and, where all of them do not take place,—as we rejoice to say that in many instances, through the influence of the principles of humanity and religion on the minds of masters, they do not,—still, the slave is deprived of his natural right, degraded as a human being, and exposed to

the danger of passing into the hands of a master who may inflict upon him all the hardships and injuries which inhumanity and avarice may suggest.

“From this view of the consequences resulting from the practice into which Christian people have most inconsistently fallen of enslaving a portion of their *brethren* of mankind,—for God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth,—it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery both with the dictates of humanity and religion has been demonstrated and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest and unwearied endeavours to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and, if possible, throughout the world.’

“The Assembly also recommended ‘to all the members of our religious denomination, not only to permit, but to facilitate and encourage, the instruction of their slaves in the principles and duties of the Christian religion;’ and added, ‘We enjoin it on all church sessions and Presbyteries under the care of this Assembly to discountenance, and, as far as possible, to prevent, all cruelty of whatever kind in the treatment of slaves, especially the cruelty of separating husband and wife, parents and children, and that which consists in selling slaves to those who will either themselves deprive these unhappy people of the blessings of the gospel, or who will transport them to places where the gospel is not proclaimed or where it is forbidden to slaves to attend upon its institutions.’

“The foregoing testimonials on the subject of slavery were universally acquiesced in by the Presbyterian Church up to the time of the division in 1838.

“In the year 1846, the General Assembly made a declaration on this subject, of which the following is the introductory paragraph:—

“‘1. The system of slavery as it exists in these United States, viewed either in the laws of the several States which sanction it, or in its actual operation and results in society, is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system, and is opposed to the prescriptions of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, and to the best interests of humanity.’

“In 1849, the Assembly explicitly reaffirmed the sentiments expressed by the Assemblies of 1815, 1818 and 1846. In the year 1850, the General Assembly made the following declaration:—‘We exceedingly deplore the working of the whole system of slavery as it exists in our country and is interwoven with the political institutions of the slave-

holding States, as fraught with many and great evils to the civil, political and moral interests of those regions where it exists.

“‘The holding of our fellow-men in the condition of slavery, except in those cases where it is unavoidable by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity, is an offence in the proper import of that term as used in the Book of Discipline, chap. 1, sec. 3, and should be regarded and treated in the same manner as other offences.’

“Occupying the position in relation to this subject which the framers of our Constitution held at the first, and which our Church has always held, it is with deep grief that we now discover that a portion of the Church at the South has so far departed from the established doctrine of the Church in relation to slavery as to maintain that ‘it is an ordinance of God,’ and that the system of slavery existing in these United States is scriptural and right. Against this new doctrine we feel constrained to bear our solemn testimony. It is at war with the whole spirit and tenor of the gospel of love and good-will, as well as abhorrent to the conscience of the Christian world. We can have no sympathy or fellowship with it; and we exhort all our people to eschew it as serious and pernicious error.

“We are especially pained by the fact that the Presbytery of Lexington, South, have given official notice to us that a number of ministers and ruling elders, as well as many church-members, in their connection, hold slaves ‘from principle’ and ‘of choice,’ ‘believing it to be according to the Bible right,’ and have, without any qualifying explanation, assumed the responsibility of sustaining such ministers, elders and church-members in their position. We deem it our duty, in the exercise of our constitutional authority ‘to bear testimony against error in doctrine or immorality in practice in any church, Presbytery or Synod,’ to disapprove and earnestly condemn the position which has been thus assumed by the Presbytery of Lexington, South, as one which is opposed to the established convictions of the Presbyterian Church, and must operate to mar its peace and seriously hinder its prosperity, as well as bring reproach on our holy religion; and we do hereby call on that Presbytery to review and rectify their position. Such doctrines and practice cannot be permanently tolerated in the Presbyterian Church. May they speedily melt away under the illuminating and mellowing influence of the gospel and grace of God our Saviour!

“We do not, indeed, pronounce a sentence of indiscriminate condemnation upon all our brethren who are unfortunately connected with the system of slavery. We tenderly sympathize with all those who deplore the evil and are honestly doing all in their power for the present well-being of

their slaves and for their complete emancipation. We would aid and not embarrass such brethren. And yet, in the language of the General Assembly of 1818, we would 'earnestly warn them against unduly extending the plea of necessity,—against making it a cover for the love and practice of slavery, or a pretence for not using efforts that are lawful and practicable to extinguish this evil.'

"In conclusion, the Assembly call the attention of the Publication Committee to this subject, and recommend the publication, in a convenient form, of the testimony of the Presbyterian Church touching this subject, at the earliest practicable period.

"The vote upon its adoption was by Yeas and Nays.

"Adopted: Yeas, 169; Nays, 26; *non liquet*, 2."—*Min* 1857, pp. 401-404.

APPENDIX.

NOTES ON THE CONFESSION AND CATECHISMS.

A.D. 1816.

"AN extract from the minutes of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, relative to the Notes appended to the Confession of Faith, was overtured."

[Subsequently it was committed to Dr. Green and Messrs. Finley and Lewis, who reported as follows:—]

"The committee to which was referred an inquiry proposed to the Assembly by the Presbytery of Philadelphia, relative to the notes found in the book containing the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, reported; and their report, being amended, was adopted, and is as follows,—viz.:—

"That the book referred to was first published with nothing but the simple text, without any Scripture proofs, or any notes of any description whatsoever. This is evident, not only from the minutes of the General Assembly, but from the numerous copies of this first edition of the standards of our Church which are now in existence. It is equally evident from the examination of the records of the General Assembly that not a single note in the book has been added to or made part of the Confession of the Church since it was first formed and published in the manner recited above. Several alterations and additions have been made by referring them when contemplated to the Presbyteries for their decision thereon, in the manner pointed out in the Constitution itself. But among all the points thus referred there is not found a single note which now appears in the book containing the Constitution of our Church. Hence it follows, beyond a doubt, that these notes are no part of that Constitution.

"If, then, it be inquired how these notes obtained the place they now occupy, and what is the character as to authority which they possess, the answer is this:—When a second edition of the standards of our Church was needed, it was thought by the General Assembly that it would be of great use in itself, highly agreeable to the members of our Church generally, as well as conformable to the example of the Church of Scotland, from which we derive our origin, if the Scripture proofs were added in support of the several parts and clauses of the Confession of Faith, Catechisms and Form of Government. A committee was accordingly appointed by the Assembly to select the Scrip-

ture proofs and to prepare them for being printed in the second edition of the Book. The work of this committee was, the following year, referred to another, and ultimately the committee charged with preparing the Scripture proofs reported, along with these proofs, the notes which now appear in the Book, and which were approved by the General Assembly and directed to be printed with the proofs, in the form in which they now appear. These notes, then, are explanations of some of the principles of the Presbyterian Church, given by the General Assembly, and which, of course, the General Assembly may modify or altogether exclude at their pleasure; whereas the articles of the Constitution must govern the Assembly themselves, and cannot be altered or abrogated but in the manner pointed out in the Constitution itself.

"On the whole, in the Book containing the standards of our Church, the text alone contains the Constitution of our Church: the notes are an explication of principles given by the highest judicature of that Church, of the same force while they continue with the other acts of that judicature, but subject to alterations, amendments or total erasure, as they shall judge proper.

"*Resolved*, That, as it belongs to the General Assembly to give direction in regard to the notes which accompany the Constitution of which they are the supreme judicatory, this Assembly expresses it as their opinion that, in printing future editions of the Constitution of this Church, the parenthesis on this part of the Form of Government, which defines a Synod, and which is expressed in these words, 'since a Synod is only a larger Presbytery,' be omitted, as well as the note connected with the Scripture proofs in answer to the question, What is forbidden in the eighth commandment? in which the nature of the crime of man-stealing and slavery is dilated upon.'

"In regard to this last omission, the Assembly think proper to declare that in directing it they are influenced by far other motives than any desire to favor slavery or to retard the extinction of that mournful evil as speedily as may consist with the happiness of all concerned."—*Min.* 1816, pp. 629-630.